Period B

Short story

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Leaning her head against the filthy, dusty windowpane, Maureen looked down at the streets below like she had done every night before falling asleep. With not a soul to whisper her dreams, her memories, her thoughts and feelings to at night, she was hungry to know about the lives of others. Curled up in a ball at the corner of her bedroom, listening to the soft snoring of her fellow roommates, she looked outside the window, secretly delighting at the occasional glimpses of people that she managed to steal and gather deep inside.

Living without proper human company had been something that Maureen had grown almost too accustomed to. Without any parents to depend on since her early years, she had often depended on others for emotional comfort and need. The people at the orphanage, while they were not as good listeners to her problems, were in full support for her actions most of the time. So engrossed in the activity was Maureen that she was not even aware of the figure who was silently watching her back from the sidewalk across the street as she absent-mindedly ran over her hair with the palm of her right hand, as she often did when she was preoccupied by a predicament.

Unbeknownst to the small girl, the man across the street had mostly been staying in the shadows, careful not to reveal himself too openly and yet wishing to catch her attention all the same. He had spent over a fortnight already in that part of town and was almost desperate to fulfill his business.

When her eyes were finally placed on the man, she began to scrutinize every minute aspect of the man from head to toe as she always did to those whom she targeted during one of her “study” periods by the window. However, she realized that there was something very, very wrong about this particular situation. The man wasn’t simply standing there- he was looking straight at her. Gripped by both fear and anxiety from having been recognized, she quickly dived in to her covers in the other side of the room before slowly peeking out through the window again to see if the man was still there. Indeed, as resolute as ever, the figure was standing there, only this time she was able to see him beckoning her towards him. Then, all of a sudden, as quickly as he had appeared, he was gone and nowhere to be found in her eyes.

With her heart pounding in her chest, she scanned over the surrounding areas and indeed was disappointed to find out that the figure who had been at the other side did not seem to have left anything particularly love there. Overwhelmed by conflicting thoughts and feelings, she lied herself down underneath the covers. As disturbing as it had been that a man was monitoring her activities, she had a strange sense of longing to simply meeting him and satisfying her curiosity.

For a full five minutes, she simply sat there on her bed, biting her nails as she contemplated over what was happening. Was the man really trying to say something to her? Burdened by such questions, she was unable to stop herself from getting her coat on and stepping outside the orphanage.

Stepping out in to the brisk, chilly autumn air, she began walking towards no specific direction across the street. Her course eventually led her to an alleyway between the two tenements that were on the other side of the street. It was in here that she saw the figure that had been studying her as she looked out her window.

“Kid, come over here,” the figure commanded in a hoarse voice that made him appear even more dangerous. Although insecure in her belief of the man, she drew closer to him. “I’m here to offer you a very important job so you need to listen carefully. I hate repeating myself so I want you to get this straight away- there’s no time to mess around. Judging by what I’ve seen, I think you would be perfect for a position in the factory- how would you feel about that, young one?”

At first Maureen simply gazed at him, contemplating what he had just told her. As the message sank in, she responded almost immediately, “when can I get started?”

“You can follow me now to the work place, although you may choose to work later on. Stay close,” he replied.

Both of them walked in silence until they had arrived at the “work place”, which was the factory. Then, all of a sudden, the man was a complete different person from the person he tried to appear to be before. He grabbed her by the arm and pulled her to the assembly line, at which she was given a uniform to wear.

“Now, work! Work until you have been told otherwise little kid,” the man commanded in an authoritative tone. “You’re going to have to earn your food- I will give you food and a place to stay only if you promise to work hard in this factory.” Confused, the little kid took a moment to look around until she realized where she was. Frightened as she was, she had did not feel the urge to resist. In fact, if anything, the man was the most guardian-like figure she had ever had in her life.